

# THE MESSENGER

ST. MICHAEL AND ALL ANGELS EPISCOPAL CHURCH



## THE RENEWAL OF SINGING HEARTS?

By Fr. David Cox

Last month I briefly described the nature of the renewal grant that St. Michael has applied for through the Lilly Endowment Clergy Renewal Program at Christian Theological Seminary. I explained some of the work that went into the grant application and shared that we will know at the end of August whether our application has been approved. I ended that essay with the question that sits at the thematic center of the grant application: "What makes your heart sing?" In this essay, I want to reflect briefly on the meaning of "renewal" and what it might have to do with one's "heart singing," using my own discernment as an example.

One can renew the registration on one's car and receive a new tag in a new color with a new year printed on it. One can renew one's library books by clicking an online link on your phone. When I was growing up, my dad was a sales rep for Andersen Windows for a number of years. Andersen Windows has a product

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line called "Renewal by Andersen" that encourages us to get rid of those old, original windows and replace them with new shinier and more efficient ones. None of these things is what we mean by renewal in Christian discipleship and ministry.

We are not trying to keep doing what we're doing—drive a car or hold onto a book; and we are not trying to replace old things—like windows—with new ones. There is a place for these practices—some of you, for example, renew your diocesan licenses for Safeguarding God's Church training in order to provide certain ministries in the church. And we sometimes replace old theological ideas or liturgical language with new ideas and new language—different windows onto the life and nature of God. These activities are immensely important . . . but they are not what we mean by renewal.

As I have reflected on it, I think that renewal is most closely linked to the age-old Christian idea of "revival." But, boy, does that word have all sorts of complex baggage for folks. So, think of Ezekiel's vision of the valley of dry bones (Ezekiel 37:1-14) into which the Spirit of God breathes new life. Think of the disciples in John's gospel when Jesus breathes into them the Holy Spirit (John 20:21-22). What does it mean to feel alive in one's life in Christ, which includes the ministries to which we have each been called?

The answer to this question is rooted in the spiritual gifts and piety that make you you and not someone else. So, knowing yourself well is essential to being renewed, because only that authentic you can be renewed in you. Some false version of yourself based on gifts and piety that are not yours can never find life in you. And the point of Christian faith is to be alive—"to take hold of the life that really is life" (I Timothy 6:19). When we live that life that really is life, we might find that our hearts are singing.

The language about one's heart singing was a challenge for me right off the bat—that is not the way I typically talk about myself at all. To use the language in the grant application without feeling disingenuous, I had to know what I meant by it. It is also true that using unfamiliar language can force one to get outside of the conceptual ruts that trap our minds and prevent the emergence of new and creative ways of thinking. Perhaps

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nowhere is creative thinking more necessary than when we reflect on the meaning, purpose, values, and vocation into which the Spirit of God inspires us. So I wrestled with the language.

I was helped in the effort by a pamphlet-sized book written by someone who once oversaw the Clergy Renewal Program (if I understand correctly). He put me at ease, explaining that the “heart singing” language was often odd-feeling to applicants when they first started the grant process. And he provided some contours for how to think about my heart singing.

Years ago, I noted in a sermon series that “joy happens to you.” It is not something that one conjures with a spell or cooks up with a recipe. One can only put oneself into circumstances where joy can happen to you; and the better one knows oneself, the better one is at cultivating or entering into the right circumstances for joy to happen.

I had a wonderful experience of this last November on a flight to Boston for the annual meeting of the American Academy of Religion. I was sitting on the plane, reading a relatively new introduction to the philosophical school known as American Pragmatism (intellectually speaking, these are my people). At a certain point, as I struggled to underline passages and take a few notes in rhythm with the bouncing plane, I had a moment of self-awareness that I could only describe as joy. I knew it for what it was and simply relished it.

Joy finds me when I am intellectually wrestling with the nature of the human condition and the nature of human beings with an eye to understanding how human beings might flourish in relation to God, other people, and the natural world in which they live. There are various ways in which to engage in this wrestling and various contexts in which it can take place (like a small group discussion about how the Bible actually works), but in those places I experience joy—and I know then what I might mean to say that this pursuit of understanding “makes my heart sing.”

The second major source of joy and heart-singing was easy for me to identify—nature. God speaks in the sounds of the wind blowing through

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the leaves of trees or water running through a rocky stream. On more than one occasion, I have sat and recorded the flowing of a river or stream with my phone for several minutes so that I could listen later. I can get lost in staring up through the branches of a tree—especially a maple or sycamore—watching the play of sunlight through the swaying branches. I love the feeling of entering the forest—a real forest, not a park—and feeling like I have entered a different world. It's cool to meet others on the trail whom you know are having a similar experience of joy.

This joy is different, though, than the first kind. In the woods, the joy is not so much exciting as it is calming. Where my intellectual pursuits feel like leaping to new heights, the joy of the woods feels like sinking roots into the deep presence of God. Despite the difference, I know that I can genuinely say that the presence of God in nature “makes my heart sing.” I know that these two practices—the pursuit of understanding God and humanity and the surrender to God's presence in the natural world—are the core of what brings me joy and what provides renewal.

Let me bring this lengthy essay to a close. A few times each year, especially at the Easter Vigil, we come together in the liturgy called “The Renewal of Baptismal Vows” (BCP, 292). Too often, I suspect, we do not take that moment of renewal seriously enough, perhaps treating it more like the renewal of a library book than the revival of the life of the Spirit within us. A parish-wide renewal process has the potential to refresh us and enliven us so that our hearts can sing with the joy of life in the way of Jesus Christ to which we have committed ourselves in faith.

I invite you to begin your own reflections on what it means for you to be renewed, revived, inspirited, refreshed. What are the passions, ideas, relationships, values, or stories that give meaning to your life as a follower of the Way of Jesus? How can your renewal and refreshment be woven together with that of other disciples at St. Michael? How is the Spirit seeking to revive you and, through you and with you, St. Michael's parish?

# broken halleluyas to beauty to happiness

All programs in the Bingham Classroom at 9:45 am

## Broken Halleluyas: How Grace Abounds All the More in the Songs of Leonard Cohen

Don Compier will lead us in this discussion of Leonard Cohen's work in our post-Holocaust world. His "Halleluya" has become one of most popular anthems of all time, yet its meaning is rarely understood.

June 18, 2026



*Father Don with his granddaughter Elise and her friend Lauren*



*Linda with her granddaughter Grace*

July 16, 2026

## Can Beauty Exist in a World at War

Dr. Linda Brown will walk the group through a discussion of the role of beauty in times of war and other tragedies, using the work of James Lucas as a base.

## The Art of Happiness

Dr. Sue Pingleton discusses happiness as a valid emotion, happiness expressed as art in our great paintings and happiness as an art (i.e., skill), and even in our own Declaration of Independence.

August 6, 2026



*Sue with her grandsons Henry & Christopher*

# MOTHER'S DAY BRUNCH



Another excellent Mother's Day brunch hosted by the Kitchen Angels on May 10.



## PARISH YOUTH OUT IN THE WORLD

This month we feature “youth alumni” updates from Henry Cannon and Charlie Senuta, as we check in on what our young people are up to now.



### HENRY CANNON

During his time at Oklahoma State, Henry was voted Homecoming King (2019). His degree program was marketing and management – Henry now works for HubSpot in Boston in the field of digital marketing.

### CHARLIE SENUTA

Charlie graduated from Olathe North in May, and is bound for Millikin University and its acclaimed theatre program.

Charlie graduated with the greatest amount of participation points in theatre activities during his high school career, and is excited to begin this new chapter.



## THE POWER OF INTERFAITH WORK



*By Asher Bloete Menke*

Interfaith work can simply be defined as collaborative efforts between different religious traditions. When I participated in the senior send-off last spring at STMAA, I embarked on a year in Salt Lake City. I was fortunate to be able to be offered a scholarship in 2025 from the University of Utah specifically for interfaith efforts.

In an increasingly diverse country, engaging across faith boundaries strengthens congregations spiritually, socially, and morally. At Utah I attended an Episcopal church that was downhill from campus by about a mile, so it did draw from the university a little bit, but largely it was a distinct community from student life. Throughout the year there were a lot of chances to engage in interfaith dialogue on campus, whether through Interfaith America or just informally in the dorms.

## INTERFAITH (cont'd.)

By learning about other religions' core beliefs, practices, and values, Christians can get new perspectives on their own spirituality. Direct interaction between faith communities also breaks down stereotypes and misconceptions.

Personal relationships transform abstract theological differences into conversations between real people. That is one thing that my beginning-of-the-year essay at Salt Lake a year ago focused on, that I wanted to work not so much on being a better speaker but wanted to learn about how to better listen to others. Especially when they disagree with me.

One thing we talked about in Salt Lake was how many of society's most pressing issues—poverty, homelessness, environmental degradation, violence, and social injustice—are shared concerns across faith traditions. When churches partner with synagogues, mosques, temples, and other communities on service projects, they can accomplish more together than separately. And getting along with others can model how people holding opposing beliefs can respect one another and build genuine friendships.



## INTERFAITH (*cont'd.*)

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### **Modeling Peace and Cooperation**

In encouraging me to think in terms of cooperating across cultural differences, my year in Salt Lake had me interacting with a lot of people who thought differently from me. We learned to argue, disagree, and accept that we weren't always going to come to a compromise that we could all accept with a smile. But in these actions we learned how to do it with compassion and most of all to learn how to listen to others.

### **Fulfilling a Gospel Imperative**

Finally, I think that interfaith work aligns with Jesus's teachings about loving neighbors and enemies, welcoming strangers, and breaking down barriers between groups. By engaging respectfully with people of other faiths, we can live out core Christian values of compassion, hospitality, and justice. There are ways to get involved in any part of the country, and for those between high school age and late 20s, the group Interfaith America (formerly called Interfaith Youth Core) is dedicated to building these kinds of activities and relationships across cultural and religious differences, and can really enrich one's faith.

